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The Buddhist Monk Experience

           The week before the start of the semester, I became a Buddhist monk for a week. During that week, my grandmother had passed away. Becoming a monk was an Asian tradition that one must go through to mourn the people that have recently passed. My grandmother was a big part of my life, and it was right that I would become a monk to honor her.

The experience of becoming a monk for the week felt discomforting from the first day, but it became easy throughout the week. From the beginning as I first wore the bright orange robes of the Buddhist monks, it was discomforting at first to wear. Shaving my head bald and my eyebrows were something that was mandatory to become a full-fledged Buddhist monk. I felt that learning the practice and tradition that the monks are adapted to, were very difficult. But, the process was easy to understand as I have been to the Buddhist temple since my childhood. The first thing that I did as a monk, was learning to recite prayers in Cambodian at six in the morning. The praying usually takes about ten to fifteen minutes to finish. Throughout the morning and afternoon, we fasten (do not eat) until we are given food from the attendees of the temple. Only the people attending the temple for annual praying seminars can give food to the monks. Before eating, we would pray for another ten to fifteen and bless the food given to us. After eating the food given to us, we start praying again. This was the everyday ritual for the past six days before the funeral. The day leading towards the funeral of my grandmother, I was fully immersed as a Buddhist monk. Reciting prayers became easy to remember as I was able to follow the head monks exactly. At the funeral of my grandmother, I was one of the monks that was leading the prayers of others to bless my grandmother. It was a sad but happy moment as I was able to see my grandmother finally pass away from the pain of health issues.

The benefits that I learned from the experience of becoming a monk, was becoming more in tune with my religion. Growing up, my mother would always take me the temple but, I would never take it serious as I would always stay outside of the temple rather than inside. In honoring my grandmother who have passed away and becoming a monk, I feel more inclined to give back to the temple I have had visited since early childhood. I have asked the monks that if I was able to attend to the temple during the weekend on certain occasions, such as during the Cambodian New Years. During the process of transitioning into a Buddhist, I felt that I made my grandmother proud. My lasting memories of her from where I was a child to an adult came flooding at me. I felt the process of becoming a monk, my grandmother was right beside me watching me from above.